

PANI COMMUNITY CENTRE

LOCATION: RAJARHAT, BANGLADESH
FIRM: SCHILDERSCHOLTE
ARCHITECTS, ROTTERDAM **TEAM:**
GERRIT SCHILDER AND HILL SCHOLTE
WITH DICK VAN GEMERDEN

SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT SIMPLY a factor in how a project is built; it also determines how a building serves the community and perpetuates its own ideals. Dutch architects Gerrit Schilder and Hill Scholte ensured that their design for a community centre in northern Bangladesh would meet these criteria when they decided on the self-imposed restriction of sourcing all materials and skilled trades for the project from a radius of 25 kilometres or less.

This meant using bamboo (an indigenous resource considered an inferior construction material in that part of the world) for the entire roof, the support columns and the wall and door cladding. It meant cheating slightly by introducing to the locally crafted bricks a foreign masonry pattern for stacking and arranging called monk bond. In doing so, the firm managed to reduce costs while maintaining a connection to the regional trades. The 910-square-metre centre – which houses a school, a bike shop, a workshop, a meeting space and a bank of toilets – cost less than \$60,000 to realize. Keeping the project local meant using recycled steel and corrugated panels, along with mango wood, increasingly popular for its sustainable nature.

Instead of imposing their building on the environment, the architects positioned it so the surrounding vegetation and a nearby pond would facilitate a cross-breeze to ventilate the classrooms. They painted the interior walls and window frames with naturally occurring colours that the insect population avoids; blue, for instance, is shunned by flies. And by sticking close to home for the construction, they barely left a carbon footprint.

In donating their services to the Pani Foundation, a charitable organization fighting poverty in Bangladesh, Schilder and Scholte wanted the process to stimulate further like-minded development; encourage more independent, locally supported projects; and, eventually, render both their contribution and the foundation's work redundant. Through this initiative, a self-sustaining community is emerging, one grounded in the ideals of sustainability.

SchilderScholte of Rotterdam is engaged in architecture, interior design and furniture design, with a focus on publicly accessible buildings. One of the firm's latest projects is an office that features a 32-metre-long wall, stacked floor to ceiling with Ikea's iconic Lack tables. schilderscholte.com



WINNER
BEST
ARCHITECTURE
< 1,000 SQUARE
METRES



WHAT THE JURY SAID:
"We all loved this project. Not only did the architects work pro bono; they made an exquisitely designed, super-light environment. This is great architecture for people who really deserve great architecture."
– WINKA DUBBELDAM

